

SCARSDALE'S BATTLE OF THE BOOKS

How One Community Dealt with "Subversive Literature"

ROBERT SHAPLEN

THE community of Scarsdale, which lies approximately forty minutes north of New York City in fashionable Westchester County, likes to refer to itself, somewhat coyly, as "just a dormitory to Manhattan." As denizens of the wealthiest county in the State of New York, one of the richest per capita in the country, the 14,500 occupants of the dormitory voted five to one Republican in the last national election and pridefully claim the highest proportion of *Who's Who* listings of any incorporated locality in the United States. They are even prouder of their public school system, which, with those of neighboring Bronxville and Winnetka, Illinois, is rated the nation's best.

During the past two years, the chief topic in Scarsdale homes and on the trains to and from Grand Central Terminal in New York has been the persevering, and hitherto unsuccessful, attempt of a small and indefatigable group to remove from the high school library and selected reading shelves a variety of works—novels, biographies, anthologies, and texts—declared to be subversive because they were written or edited by per-

sons either known or alleged to have Communist leanings. This frenzied battle of the books has had several "climaxes." Probably the most significant occurred early this past summer when, at its final school-year meeting, the board of education, composed of prominent New York business and professional men and some wives, unanimously voted down the request of the village minority for a full-dress investigation of Communist infiltration of the entire Scarsdale school system. Previously, one bitter phase of the lengthy battle culminated last May in the annual election for school board members; more than ten times the usual number of voters turned out and in formal secret ballot registered their nearly 100 per cent disapproval of those who had questioned the board's handling of the book matter. Lately, as recent as October, the board has had occasion to reaffirm its position, in the face of a vocal and determined opposition.

SCARSDALE'S reaction to its crisis is in large part the result of the unique way in which the village administers all local affairs—including operation of the schools. The initial phase of the book battle, for example, had to do with the novels of Howard Fast, a man who had not denied his Communist party affiliations and who has a long record of supporting Communist front organizations. Despite a universal distaste for Communism, and with no particular affection for Fast or his books, the Scarsdaliens nevertheless were prompted to keep eight of his works in the library not only because they deeply opposed any kind of book-burning, even in the coldest of cold wars, but chiefly because of a sense of outrage that anyone should have impugned their proven system of governing themselves; this includes the manner in which teachers, and hence books, have been selected, and the consequent way students have been taught to read and study.

The "Scarsdale system" goes back two decades, to the time when a group of local

IF ONE were to nominate the American community least likely to succumb to Communism, Westchester County's Scarsdale—affluent, Republican, sedate—would be a strong candidate. Indeed, one might expect that if—as many think—this country is infected with hysteria on the question of Communism, Scarsdale would be a quick victim. Here, however, is the story of what happened when a group of zealots tried to purge the school libraries of the works of Mr. Howard Fast, an acknowledged Communist—a case study from which our readers may be prompted to discover in what respect Scarsdale's experience and Scarsdale's pattern of community action contain a lesson for American communities. ROBERT SHAPLEN was formerly *Newsweek* correspondent in the Far East, and has written for the *New Yorker*, the *Progressive*, and other periodicals. His novel, *A Corner of the World*, was published in 1949 by Knopf.

commuters decided to take full advantage of the fact that some of the nation's most skilful executives lived in their midst. What has since evolved is akin to the concept of the old New England town meeting, at which men were "tapped" for office after being deemed worthy by their peers. Both the Scarsdale village board and the school board are so chosen. Each consists of seven persons called "trustees," and while the former makes a political point of including two known Democrats, the non-partisan school board is made up strictly on the basis of professional capabilities. Whatever is needed—lawyer, doctor, engineer, or banker—Scarsdale dips into its reservoir of talent and comes up with it.

Being exceptionally civic-minded, perhaps because they are away all day earning their living in the noisome metropolis, the men of Scarsdale feel a special obligation to keep in touch with village life. Nine hundred of them belong to the Town Club, which has nineteen standing committees for the furtherance of everything from boy scout and girl scout programs to reading, swimming, safety, the gathering of regional lore, the affairs of local, county, and state government, and, above all, those having to do with Scarsdale's main concern—education. It is not unusual for a single subject—such as "Shall Scarsdale High School Offer a Course in Driver Education and Training?"—to occupy a committee of a dozen high-powered corporation officials over a period of months. The distaff counterpart of the Town Club is the Scarsdale Woman's Club. The heads of these two clubs, and of the Parent-Teacher Association Council, form the nucleus of a citizens' committee of fifteen which every year taps the men and women it wants for the school board. As with those similarly selected for mayor and other village posts, "no" is not taken for an answer; the designated persons are simply told their services are required by the community. The annual May election always administers a public stamp of approval.

ABOUT a year and a half ago a group calling itself the "Committee of Ten" addressed a private memorandum to the school board. The committee, which at that time listed only seven members, spoke fervently of the need for greater spiritual awareness

in the classroom and implied, by the force of its appeal, that Scarsdale's schools were morally neglectful.

While this was the first declaration of the Committee of Ten, the man everyone in Scarsdale believed to be its organizer had been heard from before. He is Otto Dohrenwend, bespectacled Manhattan broker and father of four children; according to his wife, he has devoted much if not most of his time in the past four years to a meticulous study of Communist front organizations in America. Among his particular aids and guides, on the basis of what he has said and written, have been the Fourth Report on Un-American Activities in California, printed and submitted in 1948 to the California legislature by the so-called Tenney committee; the publications of the United States Chamber of Commerce, especially one called "A Program for Community Anti-Communist Action"; and the files of *Counter-attack*, a bitter and frequently indiscriminate anti-Communist magazine partly written and edited by former FBI agents.

Even before the book battle-royal began, in the fall of 1948, Dohrenwend made a commotion because in a speech by the high school principal, Lester W. Nelson, a passing non-political reference was made to the Harvard astronomer Harlow Shapley, who has supported many Communist front organizations and admittedly voted for Henry Wallace for President. (Nelson had spoken on "Current Trends in Higher Education" and had noted that Shapley was among those who favored more liberal arts training for scientists and technicians.) About the same time, at a fathers' meeting of the Fox Meadow elementary school PTA, Dohrenwend violently objected to the appearance on a class bulletin board of the cut-out mounted figure of a knight, pasted up by one of the children, because it had been taken from a popular magazine spread depicting how the Italian Communists made use of the Crusades as a subject for propaganda.

It was also in the fall of 1948 that Dohrenwend first brought up the question of books in the high school library. He asked for information on the available works of Howard Fast and of Anna Louise Strong, who at that time had not yet fallen from Moscow grace. There were then ten Fast books on

the shelves, he was told, and one by Strong. In the months that followed, Principal Nelson, Superintendent Smith, and Assistant Superintendent Archibald B. Shaw (later Acting Superintendent and now Superintendent) engaged in a series of communications and conferences with Dohrenwend, without achieving a meeting of minds on the question of what kinds of books Scarsdale's youth should find in their school libraries.

By the summer of 1949 word had got around of the Committee of Ten's existence, but nothing had come out in the open and it was hoped nothing would. The Scarsdale *Inquirer*, an excellent and profitable weekly of 4,700 circulation, owned by the Woman's Club and edited for the last twenty years by Mrs. Ruth Nash Chalmers, ran no news about it. The paper knew about Dohrenwend, however, through his previous letters to the editor, including one about the perils of over-secularized schooling. It was not until last year's first fall meeting of the school board—held each September in a room adjacent to Shaw's office in the high school, which itself occupies an attractive 25-acre tract in the Fox Meadow area—that the question of the books was publicly raised.

This was the first meeting Shaw attended as Acting Superintendent and he has since described it as "a whangdoodle." Shaw is a large, handsome, energetic, graying man just under forty. A navy radar lieutenant during the war, he knew, when he took over administration of the Scarsdale schools (enrollment 2,500, half in the high school and the rest in three elementary schools), that he was inheriting one of the best such jobs in the country, in a sophisticated, harmonious community where politics had been miraculously wished away. Accordingly, when Dohrenwend appeared, unprecedentedly bringing with him his New York lawyer, and began sharply questioning the new Acting Superintendent about the method of selecting high school books, Shaw was taken aback.

During the meeting, Dohrenwend wanted to know in detail how both texts and library books were selected, if there was an attempt made to reject books by "left-wing" authors (he referred specifically to Howard Fast's novels and Louis Untermeyer's poetry anthologies), and asked if the school board and superintendent knew the contents of books chosen. Shaw explained that the four

schools used 150 texts and had 25,000 volumes in their libraries, and that with 2,500 to 3,000 books being added yearly it was impossible for him to read every one. The board decided, only partly because of Dohrenwend's criticism, to appoint a committee to study procedures for combating subversive influence under the new state law known as the Feinberg Act.

AT THE monthly meetings that followed, the issue really began to boil. This was chiefly due to the appearance of a local clergyman, the Reverend William C. Kernan, thenceforth to play as significant a role in the book battle as Dohrenwend.

Father Kernan, as he prefers to be called (he is a High Church Episcopalian), recently became a full-time assistant at the fashionable Church of St. James the Less in Scarsdale. However, he has lived in the village, which is predominantly a Protestant community, for ten years, during which he was a part-time St. James assistant, devoting the bulk of his time to outside secular affairs.

Now fifty years of age, Kernan was ordained a priest in 1929. For twelve years he was vicar of a church in Palms, California, and then moved to Trinity Church, in Bayonne, New Jersey. Early in 1939 he appeared one day at the offices of radio station WEVD in Manhattan and said he wanted to make a radio address against Mayor Frank Hague of Jersey City. He was persuaded instead to speak out against Father Charles E. Coughlin. The speech went over so well that the station received one hundred telephone calls and fifteen hundred letters. *Time* magazine called Kernan "exciting—but more important . . . sane," and the program became a WEVD fixture as the Free Speech Forum. On the first anniversary of his debut, the station printed a book of his talks called *The Ghost of Royal Oak*, to which Kernan appended such quotations as Voltaire's "I disapprove of what you say but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

Kernan's broadcasts were kept up until last year. He acquired, after Coughlin subsided, a wider reputation as a liberal anti-fascist and anti-Communist cleric. Starting in 1940 he branched out as a columnist and lecturer, under the aegis of the Institute

for American Democracy. He quit his Bayonne parish for this new work, which was concentrated on anti-Hitler propaganda with religious overtones. But a year later, arrangements were made for Kernan to become a two-day-a-week assistant at St. James the Less, and he moved to Scarsdale with his wife and six children.

Dark and ascetic-looking, with a high forehead above deep-set eyes and a vibrant voice, Kernan quickly established a local reputation as a spellbinder in the pulpit. Increasingly, after the war ended and Communism became the new chief threat to liberty, he would stigmatize it as the antithesis of Christianity and comment despairingly on the inroads he saw it making. By last year, it was apparent to the friends with whom Kernan had worked as a radio propagandist and columnist in New York that he had not only decided to devote his full time once again to the church, but that his general approach had changed a good deal. But even they were surprised at the priest's bitterness when, commenting on his permanent appointment to St. James after his long sortie into the secular world, he wrote, in the April 1950 issue of the St. James "Parish Register": "I come to this work with an experience which, perhaps, few parish priests have had, in that, having been active for ten years in the secular world, I have learned that there is no recognition of Christ there. So, there is no effort in the secular world, however noble in purpose it may seem or is intended to be, which is without selfishness, envy or uncharitableness."

Kernan's appearance on the matter of the books inevitably lent stature to Otto Dohrenwend's campaign, since, whether everyone approved of him or not, Kernan bore listening to. Surrounded by Dohrenwend's plentiful files, the two men have invariably sat side by side at school board meetings. At the October 1949 session, Kernan made his first attack on the books. He protested against the inclusion in the high school library of works by "Communist and fascist apologists," and named four specific writers, Fast, Strong, Untermeyer, and Shirley Graham, author of a sympathetic biography of Paul Robeson. The Fast books, Kernan said, singling out *The American* and *Haym Solomon, Son of Liberty*, falsified history because they

portrayed the revolution as "a revolt of the masses" instead of as "a revolt against the mother country." All books practicing hate should be banned, he added, and in the light of the anti-Semitism created by the Nazis even Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* could be considered undesirable.

THE immediate reaction to Kernan that night was a swelling murmur of disapproval among the fifty-odd persons in the room. Board President A. Chauncey Newlin, a New York lawyer, was applauded when he said, "I don't care a hoot what a man's politics or religion are if he writes a good book." Kernan accused Newlin of "trying to throw a lot of dust in the air," and declared, "I'm surprised that I have to come here, sir, to give you a lecture on Communism." When Dohrenwend made the general charge that "the whole textbook industry has been infiltrated by Communists," he got a cold stare from S. Spencer Scott, president of the publishing house of Harcourt, Brace and Company, who earlier in the evening had presented to Kernan a copy of the Untermeyer anthology published by his firm.

Several other people attending the meeting spoke heatedly in support of the traditional procedure of the teachers' picking books in the light of their best judgment. Thenceforth, under the persistent hammering of Dohrenwend and his cohorts, the board and the apparent majority of citizens were to permit themselves to be maneuvered into a position where they defended selections from specific books in a manner that was sometimes naive and even played into the hands of the vocal minority. The fundamental principle of permitting teachers whose loyalty was unquestioned to choose and recommend books in such a way that pupils would be helped to draw their own conclusions, after "free inquiry," became subverted by this bitter and emotional argument over content, during which both sides undoubtedly did considerable quoting out of context. As a matter of fact, the longer the battle raged over various "lifted" passages and loosely prepared "case histories" of certain authors who may have been Communists or fellow-travelers, the wider became the chasm between the two sides and the more first principles were forgotten. Ul-

timately, Dohrenwend himself denied that content *was* the issue and said the character, reputation, and loyalty record of teacher or author was the vital element—thus at once implying that his chief and privately selected sources of determining these factors, such as the widely discredited Tenney report and the highly dubious files of *Counter-attack*, were basic and legitimate guides. On the other hand, and despite some excellent statements that did stress the important principle of untrammelled inquiry, the board—as will subsequently be noted—lamely defended such items as the Fast books on the basis of specific content.

Two days after the meeting Kernan spoke to the Scarsdale Post 52, American Legion, which adopted a resolution that books by "leftists" be banned from the community's schools. That same week, the names of the Committee of Ten's by-then nine members were made public for the first time by the New York *Herald Tribune's* school reporter, Mrs. Judith Crist. In addition to Dohrenwend and Kernan, the committee was composed of I. H. Schaumber, a Manhattan investment specialist and prolific writer of letters to the editor; Dr. Henry C. Link, head of the Psychological Corporation and author of *The Return to Religion* and other books; Professor Oscar Halecki, a Polish refugee who teaches at Fordham University; Ellis H. Carson, a British-born insurance executive; Sylvan Gotshal, a lawyer active in the United Jewish Appeal; Henry C. Koch, a contractor; Thomas E. O'Donnell, a lawyer.

THE day this story appeared, Robert Gordon, president of the Town Club and a lawyer for the National Dairy Products Corporation, asked three other key club members to come to his house that evening to discuss the matter of the books. The four men debated for two hours whether to issue any statement in support of the board or do nothing and hope the affair would blow over. It was decided it had already gone too far for that and was further deemed a civic matter that concerned not only the Town Club but all of Scarsdale. Before they went home the men telephoned nine other persons, representing several village organizations, and another meeting was called at the Gordon home for the following Tuesday, at which those summoned were to appear as

individuals. That meeting, also held at the Gordon home, began about eight o'clock and lasted until two in the morning. The consensus, according to one person at the meeting, was that since Dohrenwend and Kernan "had persuasive tongues and insidious arguments, we had better get our position across before people start to think there really might be some Communists in our schools." It was decided to issue a statement, signed by prominent members of the community, and at that point five of those attending began, somewhat sheepishly, to pull sheets of paper out of their pockets, confessing that they had by coincidence already written out a little something at home. A committee of three, Mrs. Burnham Finney, wife of a magazine executive, Dr. Warren Weaver, who is director of the natural sciences at the Rockefeller Foundation, and Dr. Courtney C. Brown, an economic consultant for the Chase Bank, went into the dining room to work over the various drafts.

"They closed us in with a quart of scotch and told us if we needed any more we could have it but not to come out without a statement," Dr. Weaver says.

The remaining nine men and women meanwhile drew up a list of names of potential signers, trying to confine themselves to persons who were active in Scarsdale. The list got up to eighty-one. In about an hour the triumvirate from inside reappeared and more time was spent by the whole group going over the amalgam pronouncement. It was now quite late. The eighty-one names were divided up among the thirteen, one of whom took the finished statement home and brought back copies to the Gordon place at eight in the morning of the next day, Columbus Day. By eight-thirty each of the thirteen had, somewhat sleepily, called for his or her copy and set off on a Paul Reverish round of signature-gathering. The task had to be completed before the following morning in order to get the statement into Friday's *Inquirer*.

All except a few of the eighty-one were handed a copy of the statement and personally read it before signing. There were no demurrals. Among the last to sign, simply because they were hard to track down, were Charles E. Wilson, president of the General Electric Company; Harry E. Humphreys, Jr., president of the United States Rubber Company, who had been out all afternoon play-

ing golf; and Sigurd S. Larmon, president of the advertising agency of Young and Rubicam, who returned from out of town on a late train. The list of signers included several former Scarsdale mayors, and a cross section of the prominent business and professional leaders who live in Scarsdale. Among them were Jacob Aronson, a vice-president of the New York Central System; John M. Hancock, investment banker and atomic control expert; Allan Sproul, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York; Alexander C. Nagle, president of the First National Bank of New York City; Sidney J. Weinberg, president of Goldman, Sachs and Company, investment brokers; and Arthur S. Meyer, retiring chairman of the New York Mediation Board. Quite a few active wives signed, not only for themselves, but also for husbands who were away on business trips.

THE statement, which appeared on the first page of the *Inquirer* of October 14, proclaimed in part: "We do not minimize the dangers of Communist and fascist indoctrination, but we want to meet these dangers in the American way.

"We live in a democratic state. We are the inheritors of a tradition that has encouraged a dynamic development in our intellectual as well as our material life. That tradition has been based on a tolerance that has not feared to permit independent thought. A state that fears to permit the expression of views alternative to those held by the majority is a state that does not trust itself. . . .

"Any sensible person would agree that there are risks involved in allowing young persons relatively free access to a wide range of reading material. Of course there are risks. But we believe there are greater risks in any alternative procedure. Surely we have not, as a people, lost the courage to take the risks that are necessary for the preservation of freedom."

The columns of the *Inquirer* that week began to be filled with much relevant and some irrelevant data about the battle of the books. There was an editorial entitled "Cool Heads Needed," which advocated careful and not over-hasty decisions, and the first salvo of what was to prove a long barrage of letters. There were seven letters in the issue, and the longest represented the formal bow of the so-called Committee of Ten. It was signed

by Dohrenwend for all nine members, whose names were attached, and was a stated effort to explain the committee's purposes in the light of the "unsought publicity" arising out of the board meeting. Dohrenwend still maintained that "anything smacking of witch-hunting is farthest from the committee's plan," and said: "We are primarily interested in a positive approach. For example, we should like a statement by the Board of Education as to what its policy is with regard to educating Scarsdale children in the principles of Americanism."

The other six letters were five to one in support of the board's position. The following week the ratio was almost exactly reversed. A high proportion of all letters received were from mothers, who invariably introduced themselves by announcing their maternal box scores. Mrs. Chalmers, editor and mother herself, calculated that she probably established a modern newspaper record for references per square inch of space to the Bill of Rights. There is also little doubt that a principal effect of the issue's airing was a quick race for the bookshelves. "About this time," Mrs. Chalmers recalls, "you couldn't get a book of Fast's anywhere, either in the public library or in White Plains. There were waiting lists two weeks long and you couldn't buy a pocket edition either." By then, too, the book battle had become the main topic of conversation over cocktails, dinner tables, and the New York Central's Harlem Division.

The next meeting of the Scarsdale school board, in November, was attended by so many persons, about 250, that it had to be held in the high school gym. This meeting has been described as "a real wild one," in the sense that "everyone screamed at everyone else." Many hoped the issue would be resolved, however, by a six-page report of the committee that had been appointed to examine the book situation in the light of the new Feinberg law. The committee recommended, and the board in executive session afterward approved, that the existing method of selecting books be maintained. The report declared that "protection against subversive influences can best be achieved by the positive approach of vigorous teaching rather than by negative methods of repressive censorship," and added: "The latter ensures undue attention to the censored items and substitutes

fear of ideas for freedom of inquiry. Truth is to be found through open doors."

It was soon apparent that the Committee of Ten, led by Father Kernan, was not ready to give up the fight. Although the report was heartily applauded, Kernan got up and at once began reading selections from Fast's novels. He quoted passages and juxtaposed them against something said in the *Daily Worker* or by some Communist leader. After each Fast quotation, he would assert, "That, gentlemen, is Communism."

In addition to Kernan, several other members of the Committee of Ten spoke; Professor Halecki drew a distinction between burning books and recommending them and complained that Miss Strong's book gave an entirely false picture of his native Poland (which is undoubtedly the case); and Mr. Schaumber contributed quotations from Paul Robeson's writings and did not endear himself to the ladies present by sweeping a hand toward the audience and shouting, "And here, too, we even have the women knitting."

IT MAY have been the Christmas season that kept the next two meetings relatively peaceful. In the interim, however, the battle of the books waged fast and furious in the letters column of the *Inquirer* and spread over into the newspapers of Yonkers and White Plains. Dohrenwend and Schaumber were the most ardent correspondents, combining continued attacks on Fast, whose considerable activities on behalf of Communism and Communist causes were effectively outlined, with new and wider thrusts at progressive education. Schaumber, in replying to an editorial in the *White Plains Reporter-Dispatch*, said: "We have long recognized that God has been outlawed in the classroom, and as 'nature hates a vacuum,' a new 'being' of adoration has arisen, called 'society.' Its apostles are proponents of the John Dewey philosophy known as 'progressivism,' which denies the religious nature of man. . . ."

The letter-writing marathon was presently joined, in January, by Howard Fast himself. A Scarsdale importer, J. Anthony Marcus, had written to the *Inquirer* quoting Fast as having said, "There is no nobler, no finer product of man's existence on this earth than the Communist party." Fast, in decrying Marcus's "fish-calling," insisted that "in fif-

teen years of consistent service to my country, I have never written a book or story outside of my concept of love and reverence for the United States of America." The *Inquirer* appended a note to the letter, pointing out, for the record, that Fast had not denied making the statement attributed to him by Marcus. Fast replied that although the quote had not been quite correct, "there is enough validity in it for me to choose not to deny it." So far as is known, this ended the only participation in the battle of Scarsdale of any of the authors whose books were mentioned.

A week after the Fast exchange, the *Inquirer* printed a letter that was to provide the ammunition for round two of the book battle. It came from a non-member of the Committee of Ten, C. S. Treacy, a civil engineer, whose ancestors, according to a letter he had sent in earlier, "landed at Plymouth Rock from a little vessel called the Mayflower. . . ." Treacy's charge was clearly documented. "I have just read the Bantam [twenty-five cents] edition published in 1946 of Howard Fast's *Citizen Tom Paine*," he wrote. "I would like to explain why I believe this book should not be recommended reading for minors in Scarsdale schools. . . . Cursing occurs on pages 31, 52, 56, 82, 124, 131, 138, 139, 156, 176, 177, 183, 233, 245, and 315. I believe this should be offensive to Protestant, Catholic, or Jew. Personally, the continued cursing in this book nauseated me. I feel that it is an offense against God and a bad example to the young. . . . Perhaps I am old-fashioned in my belief. However, the ten commandments are also old-fashioned. . . . What I think to be one of the greatest dangers to the young in this book occurs on pages 26, 27, and 28. These pages describe the auction sale of what are described as breeding wenches. The Negresses are shown naked to the buyers, and the effect on Tom Paine is described as one which made him both eager and ashamed. The description of the slave auction itself and of the auctioneer is quite vivid. It is the boast of the latter that all pregnant slaves, when sold, are pregnant by him. The description of one of the individual slaves would seem to me certainly to be quite broad, especially when the slave's usefulness is described as one which would make her suitable to take to bed or into a hayloft. . . . I do not believe that the young people of Scarsdale are under-

sexed, and I do not believe that this is the kind of reading matter to recommend to normally sexed adolescents. . . ."

At the school board meeting February 6, 1950, Treacy appeared, along with Kernan and Dohrenwend, who had been absent from the two previous meetings, and asked Board President Newlin why *Citizen Tom Paine* was in the high school library in view of its blasphemy and immorality. Treacy said he was raising the issue on specific content, but Newlin would not allow him to read what he called "the spiciest sections" and he was told to refer the matter to the professional staff that had chosen the book. The board subsequently agreed to consider Treacy's *Inquirer* letter as a formal written complaint, and a close study of *Citizen Tom Paine* was ordered. A nine-page, single-spaced report was prepared by the heads of the English and social studies departments of the high school and the librarian, who together spent thirty-three hours on it. They noted that it is "the only current novel which centers around the figure of Tom Paine and his contributions to the founding of our democracy." The three judges deplored "the presence of so much profanity," but said there were historical and literary reasons for it. To ban books because they contain objectionable words or depict such things as adultery would do away with the Bible and other eminent works, it was added.

On the issue of Fast's Communism, the judges demonstrated a certain naive oversimplification. "We did not find him following the party line in this book," said the judges, and they cited as proof of their point Fast's apparent attitude toward dictatorship, atheism, and the doctrine that the end justifies the means. "All references to Washington, the Jacobins, and Napoleon, and all the implications are against dictatorship," the report declared. Far from showing Paine believing that the end justifies the means, the report added, the doctrine "is shown as repugnant to Paine and to all the 'good' characters. Specifically, in dealing with the use of force, the episode concerning Napoleon is unmistakably against cloaking force as a means to a good end. . . ."

AT THE April meeting of the board, which was again held in the high school gym when 300 persons attended, only Superin-

tendent Shaw's summary approval of the report was read, but this was enough to touch off the most boisterous session of the entire controversy. (The board itself also approved of retaining *Citizen Tom Paine*, although there was not complete agreement on all phases of the matter; it was, incidentally, about this time that the book mysteriously vanished from the high school library shelves, to which it has not yet been restored.) Treacy still insisted the biography was "filthy," suggested it would be a good text for a course in "advanced blasphemy," and pointed out that it had been banned in New York City schools for not giving a true account of Paine's life, being poorly written, and containing objectionable passages; one woman replied that she hoped Scarsdale would not emulate New York. Treacy again asked for permission to read aloud from the book, prefacing his request by saying, "I don't want to shock the ladies. . . ." He was told by Newlin that if it made him feel any better, he could go ahead and read. Amid considerable tittering, he thereupon read aloud the three-page slave-auction scene, and a briefer one where, as a staymaker's apprentice at thirteen, Paine is undone by a two-hundred-pound woman come to have her corset fitted.

The reaction of Father Kernan to the *Citizen Tom Paine* ruling was to declare that "the board has gone on record in direct contradiction to the teachings of the church." He added that he would see to it "that word of this is spread beyond Scarsdale"—something he had actually already done. By now a great deal of what was said was repetitious, if more barbed, but there was a certain sharpening of issues which bore directly on the vital balloting that took place the following month. The sentiment gained ground that the Committee of Ten was impugning the whole school system and that it was seeking specific scapegoats. Newlin, at one point, emphasized that the morale of the entire school staff and Scarsdale's fine educational reputation were being undermined.

At another point, the direct issue of secularism versus religion in the schools was brought into the open by Mrs. Martin J. Brennan, wife of a noise-abatement specialist and mother of four children in the Scarsdale schools. Mrs. Brennan, hitherto silent, began by reiterating that there were few in Scars-

dale who held any brief for Howard Fast and his books or who really cared if his works were in or out of the library. But, continued Mrs. Brennan, "Suppose we ban *Citizen Tom Paine*? Suppose we ban all the Fast books, the Untermeyer anthology? Will they stop there? What comes next?" She alluded to the several letters that had dealt with the question of secularism versus spiritual and moral training and asked, with a certain finality, "I want to know what's behind all this." Kernan had his reply prepared. "What's behind this is to keep Communism out of the Scarsdale school system," he snapped. "It's already there and you don't know Communism when you see it."

Several of the letters that followed were critical of Kernan's contention that the board had flouted the church in the battle of the books. The one that drew the most attention came from the Reverend Edward C. Boynton, popular minister of the Congregational Church in Scarsdale, who wrote: "It is not clear from Mr. Kernan's use of the words 'the church' exactly for whom he speaks authoritatively. To avoid any misunderstanding because of my profession as a Minister, I state simply, Mr. Kernan does not speak for me." Kernan nevertheless continued to speak, at least for himself. Twice in the month that followed, once to the Peekskill Rotary Club and once to three hundred delegates of State Exchange Clubs at the Westchester Country Club in Rye, he severely criticized the Scarsdale school board for its allegedly lax attitude toward Communism. Dohrenwend and other members of the Committee of Ten meanwhile complained that the board and Newlin especially had been discourteous to them and had not given them a fair hearing.

THE annual election for school board members took place on the first Tuesday in May. Because of the stir created by the months-long dispute, the election was bound to receive more than the usual attention. But it is doubtful whether anyone expected 1,400 persons to crowd into the high school gymnasium on the night of May 2, and that 1,090 of them would cast ballots. (This, compared to a total of only 58 votes cast the year before.) Chiefly as a result of the stormy April meeting, word got around that there might be additional nominations from

the floor or an opposition write-in vote. Once more, Bob Gordon of the Town Club got together a small group of Scarsdale's active citizens—this, by the way, marking the only other organized effort to counteract the Committee of Ten—and it was decided to urge everyone's attendance at the election meeting on the simple grounds that the tested non-partisan method might be threatened. "A lot of people did a lot of telephoning," one woman later admitted, "and, as usual, a dirty job like that was handed over to the ladies." Several persons disclosed they were called three or four times, and one man rushed home from an Atlantic City convention just to vote.

The fears of those who had suspected an opposition slate proved unfounded. Because there were so many present, the balloting lasted an hour and a half, but when it was over the results showed that the three incumbent members up for re-election, Newlin, George Rutherford, a vice-president of National Dairy Products, and G. Stanley McAllister, a vice-president of Lord and Taylor, New York City department store, had received respectively 1,081, 1,085, and 1,084 votes. There were sixteen blanks and one write-in vote apiece for Kernan, Dohrenwend, Treacy, and a man named E. W. Berlin whom no one was able immediately to identify.

SCARSDALE felt, after the election, that the issue of the books had been properly disposed of. The villagers, however, failed to reckon with the persistence of its minority watchmen. Prior to the June meeting of the school board, the Committee of Ten gave way to a new unnamed group that included, in addition to Kernan, two other local ministers, the Reverend August W. Brustat, pastor of the Trinity Lutheran Church, and the Reverend Hugh J. Rooney, an assistant at the Roman Catholic Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary; several previous members dropped out but were replaced by others. Dohrenwend remained a key figure. On the night of June 5, Edward O. McConahay, an assistant vice-president of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in New York and spokesman for the new group, requested the school board to meet with it to consider further evidence that subversive influences were infiltrating the

school system. For the first time, openly, the charge was made that some of the teaching staff might have connections with a Communist front seeking to get certain textbooks into the public schools. (There was never, however, any accusation made against a specific teacher, nor was the "front" ever defined or identified; the nearest approach to an attack on any one teacher was a fruitless effort on the part of the minority led by Dohrenwend to obtain the name of the individual who signed the requisitions for certain books—a demand that was refused by the board on the perfectly sound ground that such a signature meant nothing since it was purely the normal product of the whole book-selection process outlined in painful detail at one of the earlier board meetings.)

A special meeting was called for the nineteenth of June with the stipulation that only new information would be brought forth. The case against the schools that night was presented for two and a half hours by ten speakers who sought to describe how the general pattern of Communist influence had been brought to bear in Scarsdale. Four well-known and widely used textbooks were cited. These included *World History*, by Boak, Slosson, and Anderson, edited by Harvard Professor William Langer, and used in the tenth grade; it was submitted to be prejudiced because it had frequent pictures of Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky to the exclusion of portraits of American heroes and Founding Fathers, because it described as "a stupendous achievement" the "transformation of the Russian peasant into a serious, highly trained industrial worker," and because it allegedly dismissed the Chinese Communists as "rarely anything but hungry peasants, whose chief interest was in getting more land rather than in political or economic theories." The other three books—each cited, with selections read aloud, by a different speaker—were *Story of America*, by Ralph V. Harlow, declared to picture America as being at the mercy of big corporations and utilities; *Our World Today*, allegedly a pro-Russian geography textbook; and *American Democracy Today and Tomorrow*, by Goslin, Goslin, and Storen, alleged to be subtly subversive in several places.

Pamphlets used as reference material, including those of the Foreign Policy Association, were declared to be equally subversive.

Dohrenwend listed the names of several men and women who had spoken in Scarsdale schools under the auspices of the Parent-Teacher Association or conducted special off-campus courses for teachers under the aegis of New York University and Sarah Lawrence College. These included a number of sponsors or speakers who, he said, had attended the Communist-front World Peace Conference held in March 1949 at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York. Among them were Professor Bert James Loewenberg, of Sarah Lawrence; Shirley Graham, the Robeson biographer; Louis Untermeyer, Dorothy Parker, Langston Hughes, the poet; Vera Micheles Dean, author of several books on foreign affairs and an officer of the Foreign Policy Association, and Anna Louise Strong. Dohrenwend, making what was perhaps his strongest point of the whole lengthy investigation, urged the school board to determine whether, over a four-year period, there had been a preponderant number of speakers at Scarsdale PTA meetings or at off-campus course sessions whose opinions might be questioned as exemplifying an objectionable "educational philosophy."

THE Reverend Dr. Brustat summed up the charges by referring to Louis F. Budenz's *Men Without Faces*, in which that ex-Communist author speaks of a Communist plot to influence citizens of Westchester County, directly or indirectly, through wealthy party members and leftist lecturers. When Dr. Brustat had finished, Board President Newlin asked him if he believed the evidence offered during the lengthy session warranted an investigation aimed at "rooting out" teachers suspected of promoting the use of subversive material. The pastor promptly answered, "I most assuredly do."

Superintendent Shaw thereupon arose and read a report on "The Loyalty of Our Teachers." He referred to the "understandable uneasiness" Scarsdale families had come to feel as a result of "the repetition over the months of charges implied and overt," now capped by "new and grave, if hitherto unsupported, accusations involving our staff." After reviewing the standards which govern the selection of the 133 teachers in the Scarsdale school system, Mr. Shaw said: "I want to state positively, without reservation, that every teacher in our schools is a loyal

American. . . ." He added that he couldn't say they were alike in their religious, economic, social, or political beliefs, nor did he know what they read, but "I do know that they are good people for our children to be with." In teaching various subjects as well as "the acts of citizenship in a democracy," Mr. Shaw emphasized, "a good teacher, alert and imaginative, calls on many sources, many references," using books "as tools, no more, to be picked up and laid down as useful."

On July 5, at the next regular board meeting, Mr. McAllister, the new president, made the climactic announcement that the board had voted 7-0 against conducting an investigation. He said: "In the two years or more since this subject has been under discussion, no one has presented any evidence to indicate that our teachers, by the use of books or pamphlets or otherwise, have been inculcating subversive ideas in our school children." Superintendent Shaw read selections from the four textbooks that had been cited to deny the charge that they were slanted.

THE Scarsdale citizens' group that demanded the investigation, after condemning the "whitewash" by the board, has indicated it regards the whole affair as a continuing one, although at the second 1950 fall meeting, in October, the board finally announced that it would hear no more verbal attacks at the monthly public sessions; this led at once to a barrage of letters to the *Inquirer* charging a "gag." At the same time, however, not as a result of the lengthy battle but because Superintendent Shaw has wanted to do it for some time, a committee to study citizenship education in Scarsdale was established, composed of eight lay members and three from the school staff.

Under the circumstances of mounting tension between the Communist and non-Communist world, as exemplified by the Far Eastern crisis and other probable crises to come, the Scarsdale affair will undoubtedly be repeated in communities throughout the nation. It may be too much to expect every town and village involved in a similar conflict to treat it as patiently as did Scarsdale and with such a cool collective head (one woman explained, "You know, this is a community of executives, and they just don't like to be told what to do"). It is not even inconceivable that in the days to come Scarsdale's

citizens themselves might suffer a failure of poise. Given the present dynamics of Communist expansionism, with its attendant tactics of disruption everywhere, it will inevitably become harder and harder to define what is subversive and to distinguish between healthy exposure of false and subtle propaganda on the one hand and blind fear of anything less than "100 per cent Americanism" on the other.

There are few in Scarsdale who would not admit today (if indeed they ever had doubts) that Communists in the United States do seek to "infiltrate" our schools, communities, organizations, etc. Most villagers also acknowledge that a good, thoroughly indoctrinated Communist will try to bring the party line into what he says or writes (although this does not necessarily hold good of a Communist sympathizer). Further, those Scarsdalian who sat through the endless school board sessions and then went home and read the "subversive" books were undoubtedly aware that some of them came from the pens of persons not especially reticent in their praise of Soviet Russia. Yet the decision was made that any form of censorship represented a much worse sort of risk. In the last analysis, Scarsdale affirmed its faith in its children as well as its teachers; Superintendent Shaw at one point reminded everyone that there hasn't been a fellow-traveler in a carload of high school graduates, a good proportion of whom have distinguished themselves in the ultra-respectable halls of Princeton, Yale, and Harvard.

Finally, and perhaps of most import in the long run, Scarsdale's handling of its crisis set back—or at least gave no aid or comfort to—a nationally spreading hysteria; invariably, elsewhere as here, this has found expression in guardians whose bland assumption that they and they alone have the blessing and vision of God leads them into the belief that others ostensibly less clairvoyant and omniscient are incapable of recognizing and appraising a "clear and present danger." Many a Scarsdalian who has voted the straight Republican ticket since he came of age was surprised, in the last two years, to hear himself called a "soft liberal" by the nervous watchmen in his midst. Presaging, it may be hoped, a broader development, much needed, the proud Scarsdalian simply reared back and asserted his "enlightened conservatism."